

**DELIVERING FOR PENNSYLVANIA:
EXAMINING POSTAL SERVICE DELIVERY
AND OPERATIONS FROM THE
CRADLE OF LIBERTY**

HEARING

BEFORE THE
SUBCOMMITTEE ON GOVERNMENT OPERATIONS
OF THE

**COMMITTEE ON OVERSIGHT AND
REFORM**

HOUSE OF REPRESENTATIVES

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**DELIVERING FOR PENNSYLVANIA:
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Wednesday, September 7, 2022

HOUSE OF REPRESENTATIVES
COMMITTEE ON OVERSIGHT AND REFORM
SUBCOMMITTEE ON GOVERNMENT OPERATIONS
Washington, D.C.

The subcommittee met, pursuant to notice, at 11:02 a.m., Temple University, 1810 Liacouras Walk, Philadelphia, Pennsylvania, and via Zoom; Hon. Gerald E. Connolly (chairman of the subcommittee) presiding.

Present: Representatives Connolly, Norton, Davis, Lawrence, and Lynch.

Also present: Representatives Boyle, Evans, Scanlon, Dean, Houlahan, Cartwright, Fitzpatrick.

Also present: Senator Casey.

Mr. CONNOLLY. The committee will come to order.

Without objection, the chair is authorized to declare a recess of the committee at any time.

I want to welcome everybody to this field hearing in Philadelphia, which seeks to understand the mail delivery performance issues that plaque this region.

Before I begin my opening statement, I want to ask unanimous consent that the following members shall be waived on to the subcommittee as participants for the purpose of this hearing: Senator Bob Casey, Congressman Brendon Boyle, Congressman Dwight Evans, Congresswoman Mary Gay Scanlon, Congresswoman Madeleine Dean, Congresswoman Chrissy Houlahan, Congressman Matt Cartwright, and Congressman Brian Fitzpatrick.

Without objection, it is so ordered.

I now recognize myself for an opening statement.

Last October we held a hearing in Chicago to investigate the deteriorating mail delivery performance in that region. In February, we went to Baltimore, the city with the worst on-time delivery rating in the Nation.

Today marks our third field hearing examining postal delivery in the last 10 months. Philadelphia, the host of our third hearing, is the birthplace of our Constitution and the hometown of the Nation's first postmaster general, Benjamin Franklin.

This city is a fitting location to examine the Postal Service which has transformed since its operations began even before the signing

of the Declaration of Independence. In 1753, Benjamin Franklin assumed the role of deputy postmaster general of the colonies, helping a money-making mail-in venue for Britain that catered exclusively to lawyers and business people.

Then the Postal Service was too expensive for most people to access, until Mr. Franklin took steps to democratize the service. Once he became postmaster general, Franklin streamlined postal routes, improved accounting practices, and most importantly, Franklin made the Postal Service more equitable, lowering prices, and expanding services to attract a universal customer base that ensured the Postal Service was not a darling of the rich and that it could serve as a vehicle for uniting the then-colonies.

It is with these egalitarian and foundational ideals in mind that we hold this hearing today in the cradle of the Nation's liberty. We're here to ensure that the Postal Service continues to bond this Nation as a union.

Throughout the COVID-19 pandemic, our Postal Service work force delivered prescriptions, medications, paychecks, food stamps, stimulus checks, holiday cards, gifts, rapid COVID tests provided by the Biden administration, and so much more to homes and businesses across the Nation.

A June 2020 Harris poll found that the Postal Service ranked as the single most essential company to Americans during the pandemic. It outranked companies that manufactured PPE and sanitizers.

According to Pew Research, 91 percent of Americans had a favorable view of the Postal Service making it by far the most popular agency associated with the Federal Government.

The Postal Service employees 630,000 individuals who live in every single congressional district. That work force delivers mail to more than 163 million delivery points every day and operates more than 31,000 postal offices nationwide.

In April, I was proud to cosponsor it, the Congress enacted the Postal Services Reform Act. This once-in-a-generation legislation puts the Postal Service on the path of financial solvency, unshackling it from unfair statutory burdens that kept it marred in unnecessary payments and debt. The bill plants the Postal Service on firm financial ground readying it for the future.

Now Congress must make sure that the Postal Service leadership is prepared and poised to take the reins we hand them. Recent reports and constituent voices leave us concerned that they are not. A recent inspector general report, for example, found that the Postal Service has not been meeting the needs of its customers. In fact, the Postal Service Office of Inspector General found that the Postal Service only met service performance targets for three of 33 products in Fiscal Year 2020.

Good reliable service is vital to the Postal Services long-term survival. Late or lost deliveries drive mailers away from using the Postal Service. Fortunately, nationwide service performance has improved since 2020, consistently meeting on-time delivery targets in most regions.

We should certainly recognize that progress, but I want to note that the Postal Service reduced its on-time delivery targets during that time period, particularly for first-class mail. So some of the

improvement we see is pursuant to the lower standards adopted last year.

And I think most consumers would like to see us go back to the higher standards and have high performance goals met there.

Today, we're in Philadelphia, the city of brotherly love, to look at on-time mail delivery and more.

First, we want to highlight the Postal Service's recent announcement that it will consolidate functions, including more than 200 post offices and postal facilities across the country, including several here in Pennsylvania.

In addition the Postal Service previously announced it intends to cut up to 50,000 positions to reach a break-even point as part of Mr. DeJoy's 10-year plan. Chief among Congress' concerns is that Postal Service has, once again, failed to keep its key stakeholders informed, effectively informed of their plans and how it will impact careers and everyday job performance.

We also remain inherently skeptical of long-term Postal Service plans that rely on rate hikes, slower service, lower standards, fewer workers, and reduced infrastructure.

Ben Franklin who invested in more services for more people would, I think, be dubious. We also have a keen interest in ensuring that the Postal Service is prepared to serve as a linchpin of the voting franchise. During the 2020 election, the Postal Service delivered roughly 543 million pieces of election mail, including 135 million ballots to and from voters, a 96 percent increase from 2016.

In 2022, the Postal Service is already helped deliver ballots for 42 primaries, runoffs, and special elections. Compared to the same time period in 2018, election mail volume has increased 200 percent and growing.

Pennsylvania is a key crossroads for American democracy. We must ensure that everyone has unfettered access to vote using the methods that work best for them. Many states have deadlines for requesting and returning election ballots that make it difficult or potentially impossible for Postal Service employees to deliver them to election officials in time to qualify as a valid vote.

In other states like Pennsylvania, conservative legislators have sought to place restrictions on mail-in voting, citing utterly unfounded election fraud claims. Vote by mail is safe and effective. So safe and effective that both former President Trump and the current postmaster general Louis DeJoy vote by mail.

Today, we seek to answer questions that ensure that the Postal Service is ready for its consequential role in this November's mid-term elections. Mail theft and mail-related crime have skyrocketed in Pennsylvania and across the Nation.

Between 2018 and 2021, robberies of mail carriers more than tripled and robberies involving a gun more than quadrupled according to Postal Service data.

The postal inspection service is opening cases in only a fraction of these crimes offering little in the way of crime prevention. The Philadelphia Inquirer called Pennsylvania a hot spot for check theft with 871 stolen checks found on the dark web in May 2022 alone.

Meanwhile, the postal police force has shrunk to 455 officers, down 65 percent from 1341 officers back in 2002.

And the Postal Service has determined that these offices should be confined exclusively to Postal Service property, all but inviting would-be thieves and ill-doers to prey on postal workers and their customers while they're on delivery routes because they're not on Postal Service property.

We need more postal police who are vested with the authorities needed to prevent crime and stop them where they happen. Finally, we need to make certain, as Postmaster General Benjamin Franklin did, that the Postal Service is accessible to everybody. We must ensure that rate hikes do not return the Postal Service to a service of the privileged. We must ensure that rate hikes are reasonable and reviewed.

That's why today I introduced the Ensuring Accurate Postal Rates Act, which would require the Postal Regulatory Commission, which has oversight authority over the Postal Services rate determinations to restart their rate making system review process and to include the positive financial effects of the Postal Service Reform Act to determine if existing enhanced rate increases are warranted.

We have a full agenda of policy issues for today's hearing and to start will hear testimony from two constituents of our members in attendance today to help focus our attention on issues of access to postal facilities and care and justice for those who risk their lives delivering mail every day.

I look forward to hearing from these constituents, our witnesses, members of the Pennsylvania delegation and to ensuring that Pennsylvanians are getting the mail delivery systems they need and deserve. Ben Franklin would expect no less.

So we're going to hear from two constituents, one of whom, I believe, is yours Ms. Houlahan and the other is yours Ms. Scanlon and then we'll give every member an opportunity—Brian, I'm sorry, I didn't see you walk in. Can you wait for these two constituents—OK.

And then if you have an opening statement, I'll call on you right away. And then we'll give every member an opportunity for a three-minute opening statement and then we'll go to our testimony if that's all right.

Roll the video.

[Video shown.]

Mr. CONNOLLY. I want to thank you both for participating. And the first witness or first constituent we heard from is Mary Gay Scanlon's constituent and the second witness, Joe, is Chrissy Houlahan's constituent. So thank you both.

The chair now recognizes the distinguished member from Philadelphia, the acting ranking member of the subcommittee today, Brian Fitzpatrick. Thank you, Brian. You're recognized for any opening statement you may have.

Mr. FITZPATRICK. Thank you, Chairman Connolly, for the promotion today. I guess this is a one-day operation. Is that how it works, with the promotion?

Thank you. Welcome to the city where America was born, Chairman Connolly, and also where the post office was born, as well as many other features of our government. Thank you to our panelists today for being here. And there's one thing that I think we can say unequivocally speaking on behalf of everybody on the panel here

and that is our complete and total support for the importance of the U.S. Post Office, the importance and our appreciation for the workers who have overcome a lot of challenges. The Post Office has had to overcome a lot of challenges.

COVID impacted everyone and everything. Perhaps no entity more than the U.S. Postal Service and the challenge wasn't just to the entity itself, but to the customers that the post office serves, because so much of what we receive in the mail is time sensitive as the chairman pointed out. Utility bills, credit card bills that carry late fees, sale items that are time sensitive and the like.

So on-time delivery is certainly a critical element and key to the success of the post office, which is why we were all proud to support the Postal Reform Act. There were a number of things that were needed for a long time that was long overdue, ensuring six-day delivery, ensuring door service, eliminating the prefunding mandate, which was unique to the post office.

It was a problem that the government created that the government had to undo. Thankfully that has been undone because it was that specific provision that led to years and years of insolvency and financial hardship by the USPS due to no-fault of their own, due to a very antiquated and unfair prefunding mandate. So we're glad that those things are now being addressed.

A couple things I wanted to point out, obviously one of the purposes of these hearings is to make sure that we can take information back, put things on the record, No. 1, and actually make additional changes that will make the Postal Service's job easier, because it is one thing across the board I'm sure that all of my colleagues have been in a similar situation where we're hearing from constituents about concerns about delays, about wrong delivery to the wrong address and also something that's concerning to me is recruitment and retention challenges for our postal workers and our letter carriers.

It's a hard job. It's a very, very hard job to be a postal worker or letter carrier, even in the best of times. These are very challenging times for all of those workers, both from a workload perspective, a mental health perspective, a personal/physical safety perspective. It's a hard job. And what we want to do here is to do what we can to make that job easier.

And we have labor shortages across the board. We have supply chain disruptions across the board and it's our job to address each one of them individually and none are more important than making sure that we address those issues with the U.S. Postal Service, because if the Postal Service is in any way, shape, or form broken that has a ripple effect on so many different aspects of everyone's life. So Chairman Connolly, thanks for coming to Philadelphia.

And I yield back.

Mr. CONNOLLY. Thank you so much, Mr. Fitzpatrick. And thank you so much for joining us today and for your leadership on so many issues here in the greater Philadelphia area and in Washington, DC.

The chair now calls on the distinguished Congresswoman from the District of Columbia for a three-minute opening statement should she have one, Congresswoman Norton. Welcome Ms. Norton.

Ms. NORTON. Thank you, Chairman Connolly.

Can you hear me?

Mr. CONNOLLY. Loud and clear.

Ms. NORTON. Thank you, Chairman Connolly, for holding this hearing on the United States Postal Service.

In my district, the District of Columbia, like other jurisdictions, we have seen an increase in mail theft and widespread delayed and undelivered mail. The public's confidence in the Postal Service, a critical institution, has been shaken.

Mail theft, particularly of checks, has been increasing throughout the country. I've been contacted by constituents who have had their checks stolen from the mail and altered, and thousands of dollars taken from their accounts. The increase in thefts also puts the safety of our hard-working postal workers at risk.

I would like to thank all of our witnesses for being here, but I would especially like to thank Frank Albergo, the National President of the Postal Police Officers Association, who has worked with my office to combat mail theft.

I'd like to conclude by noting that I have introduced a bill to combat mail theft, which would clarify the authority of the U.S. Postal Police Officers to protect the mail, Postal Service property, and Postal Service employees wherever they are located.

Thank you again, Chairman Connolly, for holding this important hearing.

And I yield back.

Mr. CONNOLLY. Thank you so much, Congresswoman Norton. And thank you for your leadership. We look forward to working with you on that bill. I now recognize the distinguished gentleman from Massachusetts, my family's Congressman and a long-time leader on postal issues without whose leadership I don't think we would've gotten postal reform done this year, Mr. Steve Lynch.

Mr. LYNCH. Thank you, Mr. Chairman. And it is great to join you and my colleagues and all the members from the Pennsylvania delegation. Thank you so much for your keen interest in this and, Mr. Chairman, thank you for focusing on this issue, especially in the advance of the midterm elections.

I did have a couple of questions just for our witnesses, and they can answer them at their leisure, but No. 1, I noticed from state to state – and Mr. Chairman, you did enormous and yeoman's work on the postal reform bill. I do notice that for voting by mail, the standards are literally state by state. And while in Massachusetts, we have a bar code system that automatically prioritizes, you know, election mail, that is not the case in every district.

And as the chairman pointed out, there are some deadline systems that have been passed by legislatures that do not wish to facilitate vote by mail that actually leave the post office a very slim opportunity to process the vote by mail system and the deadlines are so tight.

So my question is, basically, what are we doing—and this is for the inspector general, as well as for postal leadership—what are we doing to prepare, perhaps harmonize that system across all 50 states, if possible? And what are we doing to prepare for any glitches that might occur in the upcoming elections given what we went through last time with the threat of the actual removal of

high-speed sorting machines from many of our general mail facilities, what are we doing to prepare for that eventuality in the next election?

Thank you, Mr. Chairman, again, for all your great leadership on this committee.

And I yield back.

Mr. CONNOLLY. Thank you, Mr. Lynch. And we're going to hold that question until we have sworn in the witnesses who cannot actually answer a question until they're sworn in, but we will make sure we cover that question if you're not still with us, Mr. Lynch.

Mr. LYNCH. Thank you.

Mr. CONNOLLY. The chair now wants to recognize members of the Pennsylvania delegation and calls on Mr. Boyle, Congressman Boyle for any three-minute opening statement he may have.

Mr. BOYLE. Well, thank you. And welcome to Pennsylvania's second congressional district. We are in my congressional district, which I'm honored to serve. I want to thank the staff of this committee, as well as my staff who worked hard in order to get us a location and make today possible. And I want to thank Temple University, which I'm also proud to represent, for hosting us.

And I especially want to thank you, Chairman Connolly. I remember many months ago on the House floor talking to you about the issues that we were having specifically in the Philadelphia area for years now, but especially this year when it comes to mail delivery and all sorts of assorted issues, some of which you've already referenced.

So I appreciate your responsiveness and you were saying that you would come up here and that we would hold a congressional committee hearing here in the Nation's birthplace, and it's a true honor for all of us in Philadelphia having a congressional committee leave Washington and hosting it elsewhere is obviously quite rare.

So it is an honor here for us in this city. I want to share with you just a couple statistics to help put this in perspective what we're talking about.

Now, I have four constituent service offices in Philadelphia from the far northeast to within walking distance of here on Girard Avenue. In 2019, obviously pre-pandemic, we had 60 postal service-related case works and complaints.

In 2020 that spiked to 199. In 2021, fortunately, it dropped to 147. This year, however, 2022 with still four months to go, we are on pace to eclipse that 199 that we received in 2020. So think about where we were in the pandemic in 2020 and 2021 versus today, and yet this year is by far the worst for my constituents.

So I think the conclusion is pretty unavoidable. While COVID-19 has presented extraordinary challenges over the past 2 1/2 years, it seems quite clear that steps taken by Postmaster DeJoy and senior management at the Postal Service have clearly been inadequate to get service levels where they should be.

Frankly, I have heard from constituents telling me that in their lifetime the Postal Service has never been in a worse shape. Louis DeJoy, you are no Benjamin Franklin. There is a reason why I and others of my colleagues have called for his termination. I reiterate that today.

We need change at the very top of the Postal Service. I look forward to listening to the witnesses and discussing the myriad issues that have developed over the last several years.

With that, again, I thank you, Chairman Connolly.

I yield back.

Mr. CONNOLLY. What a pro. Right on time. Thank you so much, Congressman Boyle.

I see our colleague, Congresswoman Lawrence, are you on?

And all right. We'll come back to Congresswoman Lawrence.

Senator Casey, I see that you are on and I know that you're in session in the Senate and under a tight schedule. So we're happy to recognize you for any opening statement you may have and welcome so much to this hearing of the subcommittee.

Senator CASEY. Mr. Chairman, thank you very much for this opportunity and I'm really honored to be part of this hearing. I'm really grateful. This is a rare privilege for a senator to appear at a House hearing, and I'm grateful for the time. I'll try to be brief.

I wanted to start by thanking you, Mr. Chairman, and the members of the committee for this opportunity for the important issues that are raised at this hearing. And I also want to recognize the terribly difficult challenges the Postal Service has faced over the last couple of years and to thank postal workers for persevering, is a better word, under these terribly difficult circumstances. They've worked very hard and it's a very difficult job they've done, especially in the midst of a pandemic and so many other challenges.

And so we applaud those frontline postal workers for their service, but we cannot ignore, as you know better than I, the reports of systemic problems with the quality, the quality of mail service, from extended delays and delivery to mail theft, constituents all across the Commonwealth of Pennsylvania have reported Postal Service issues to my office just like all of yours.

Just a couple of examples. My office received numerous reports from Luzerne County, Pennsylvania up in the northeast corner of our state. Representative Cartwright knows it well. Reports of delays and receiving all kinds of mail from prescriptions to paychecks. My office has also heard from numerous attorneys in both Montgomery and Dauphin Counties, who have serious concerns about significant delays in legal mail. Another situation which I know you've heard about is in Philadelphia, the Germantown Post Office, is a terrible example of how egregious and long-term many of the problems with the Postal Service is in Pennsylvania.

So my constituents have been told or have told my office that delays have led to unnecessary hardships like paying late fees on missed bills, being unable to respond in a timely manner to critical documents, and despite repeated attempts by members of various communities in our state to resolve these issues with senior Postal Service officials, the reports of serious service issues have persisted.

Now, I understand that these problems are difficult to solve, but we have to make a lot more progress than we've made over the last couple of years. Pennsylvanians, just like every other constituents in every other state, rely on the Postal Service whether it's to com-

municate with loved ones or engage in business or receive critical documents or even medical supplies.

And we know that quality service that is timely, that's secure, and is responsive is essential for all of our constituents. I believe the Postal Service can provide the quality service that Americans deserve, and I look forward to the opportunity to support the Postal Service as it seeks to improve, improve service quality. But we've got a lot of work to do and these answers, answers to these questions have to be responded to like all of the members of the committee have begun to outline.

So Mr. Chairman, I want to thank you for this time and allowing me to be part of it.

Mr. CONNOLLY. Thank you so much, Senator Casey. And thank you for being with us today and for your commitment to the whole plethora of postal issues that matter so much to the people of the Commonwealth of Pennsylvania and all Americans. So thank you.

The chair now recognizes subcommittee member and one of the great leaders in postal reform and a former postal worker herself, the Honorable Brenda Lawrence of Michigan. Welcome, Ms. Lawrence.

Mrs. LAWRENCE. Thank you so much, Mr. Chairman. Thank you for yielding. First, I want to thank the subcommittee for organizing this field hearing in Philadelphia to examine the issues of mail delivery performance, worker safety, and efforts to reduce mail theft and more.

The Postal Service is the only organization and company or Federal agency that touches every single home in America six days a week. The U.S. Constitution even stressed the necessity of safe and speedy mail delivery. That is why we must take every step possible to protect our postal workers to ensure their safety while they execute on their duties.

It is an important part of American history and life. And of all the things that we do to keep our economy going, this is a very important role. I spent 30 years as a member of the United States Postal Service family. I recall the pride and the sense of responsibility in delivering the mail, but I also had a great expectation and faith in our postal police and inspectors. And I want to be thankful to all of them and to the witnesses who are before us today.

All of us have a critical role to play. So thank you to the U.S. Postal Service Office of Inspector General and for the work that you do in ensuring efficient mail delivery and safeguarding the integrity of the postal system for almost 30 years and to the Post Office Police Officers Association whose primary job is to prevent and respond to postal-related crime, yes.

The Postal Service is too first responder in protecting what we call the United States Postal Service. I look forward to hearing about your experiences and seeing what recommendations you have to offer. Thank you for all that you do.

And Mr. Chairman, I yield back.

Mr. CONNOLLY. Thank you so much, Mrs. Lawrence. And we look forward to working with you even out of Congress on these vital issues.

The chair now recognizes the distinguished gentleman from Scranton, Pennsylvania where the chair went to high school, Mr. Cartwright. Welcome.

Mr. CARTWRIGHT. Well, thank you to subcommittee chair, Gerry Connolly, for convening this hearing. And thank you to my fellow members of the Pennsylvania delegation and representatives from the United States Postal Service for being here.

Over the past two years, my office has seen a record number of constituent calls and case work requests for assistance with the mail and package delivery. Hundreds of constituents have called in my office, written letters, responded to my online survey, sent emails to express their concerns about the USPS.

We've heard horror stories from constituents who are told by their local post offices that first-class mail is going unsorted and there aren't enough carriers to cover all the routes, all of this resulting in astonishing delays in delivery.

Constituents in communities across my district, the eighth congressional district of Pennsylvania, have reported going more than two days without mail, despite a promise made to my office that no household should go more than one day without a delivery.

Earlier this year, residents of South Abington Township in Pennsylvania, just north of Scranton, were going 10 to 12 days without mail. Not only were there reports of package and mail delivery being poor and unreliable, but also the same thing at post office locations. Hours were shortened, locations were closed for days without notice. The Bushkill post office in my district was closed for five consecutive days earlier this year.

Look, people rely on the mail and the Postal Service to conduct the business of their daily lives, to get their medication, to pay their bills, to receive the benefit checks that they're owed. And the answer is not just a pad, oh, you should use online banking or get direct deposit. No. The answer is holding the U.S. Postal Service accountable to do their job while also listening to their concerns or needs for additional resources.

I've worked directly with the USPS on this to get the issues resolved, including meeting directly with Gary Vaccarella. Glad to see Gary is on this Zoom and other members of his staff, but, unfortunately, I have to tell you, these issues are ongoing. I've demanded solutions for my constituents, but the complaints keep coming in and it seems like as one community's issue appears to resolve, another community in my district reports delivery delays, problems at their post office locations, or other issues.

I think everybody here can agree that we're on the same page of wanting reliable, expeditious mail and package delivery. We want the post office to work.

I'm glad you're having this hearing, Chairman Connolly. I hope we have a productive one and work toward solutions to better serve the people of Pennsylvania.

Yield back.

Mr. CONNOLLY. Thank you, Mr. Cartwright. Again, a pro. Right on time.

The chair now recognizes the other Representative across the street from Temple University right here, the Honorable Dwight Evans, for his opening remarks.

Mr. EVANS. Thank you, Chairman Connolly.

Chairman Connolly, when you mentioned our colleague Lynch name, I thought of a gentleman, a former speaker of the House, and it's very appropriate that you have that all politics are local.

Thank you, Mr. Chairman. I want to begin by thanking all of today's witnesses, the U.S. Postal Service is one of the most important agencies in the United States. I'm glad to see that we are taking the recent troubles in Postal Service performance seriously.

Over the past two years, my district has dramatic increases in the amount of loss or stolen mail, undelivered packages, post office closures, and poor performance by the local post office. My constituents like the constituents in every congressional district relies on the USPS for timely delivery, important financial documents, medication, voter registration forms, ballots, paychecks, rent, utilities, small business deliveries, and more, yet my office have received hundreds, I repeat hundreds of complaints regarding delivery of these items to residents and businesses.

And when we have discussed these concerns with local USPS leadership on numerous occasions we have not received satisfactory responses. A particular concern is the status of the Germantown Station Post Office located on Green Street, which have received numerous complaints regarding poor performance.

The Green Street Post Office has reported numerous losses, damage, stolen mail. Many constituents have come to me seeking assistance when their expected delivery never arrives. These issues have prevented senior citizens in their apartments from receiving medication and Social Security.

Furthermore, the staff of at the Germantown Post Office has failed to adequately respond to the constituent concerns leaving my residents confused and unable to access Postal Service. Now, we all recognize that there will be the occasional hiccups in delivering any service to American people, but this type of unresponsiveness and lack of urgency on behalf of the USPS is simply inexplicit.

Repeated incidents like this will only worsen Americans' faith in this Postal Service and in the government's ability, more broadly, to do what's needed to be done to protect them.

When my office is written to and spoken with, I have found the responses inadequate. So I say, Mr. Chairman, I thank you for your leadership at bringing it here to Philadelphia where a gentleman by the name of Ben Franklin took the lead.

So I'm here to work together with you and your leadership. And thank you for this opportunity.

I yield back.

Mr. CONNOLLY. Thank you so much. I thank you for your commitment to your constituents' plight and commitment to trying to resolve these issues and find solutions.

The chair now recognizes the gentlelady from Chester?

Ms. SCANLON. No. Delaware County, Philadelphia.

Mr. CONNOLLY. Delaware County. Oh, part of Chester?

Ms. SCANLON. city of Chester.

Mr. CONNOLLY. city of Chester. I got that right. Mary Gay Scanlon.

Ms. SCANLON. Thank you, Chairman Connolly. And we're really grateful for you bringing this hearing to Philadelphia, not just be-

cause it's the birthplace of the post office, but because we've seen so many issues in this region over the last few years.

You know, as we know, the Postal Service has been plagued with service issues since the installation of Postmaster DeJoy in June 2020. I'm extremely concerned about the degradation of service which we've seen and concerned that it will continue, particularly with the announcement of this new plan to close and consolidate a couple hundred local sorting and delivery operations, including many in the Philadelphia area.

This is important because the U.S. Postal Service is an essential public service that Americans, small businesses, and government agencies rely upon. We need to make sure that people can receive and pay their bills in a timely way, conduct business, get their medications from the VA, and that government agencies can send out and receive tax bills and other important government documents.

What we've seen under Postmaster DeJoy is an approach to the Postal Service that prioritizes alleged efficiencies over service. We've seen changes that are more appropriate to running a private business that provides overnight delivery for champagne or crudites or other luxury items rather than for an agency that provides an essential public service.

So today I'd like to focus on some of the issues that my constituents have been experiencing and I would note, again, that we have received more communications, whether mail, email, telephone calls, or getting stopped on the street about service issues over the last few years than any other issue my office has heard about.

You know, the Philadelphia region has experienced some of the worst rates of on-time mail delivery in the Nation with an on-time delivery rate of just 61.9 percent in the third quarter of Fiscal Year 2021. We fielded hundreds of calls and messages from constituents regarding late delays or non-delivery of the types of items I've mentioned.

While delivery rates have improved nationwide and in Pennsylvania, some of this appears to be only because the goalposts were moved. They were given more time to make on-time delivery. This was particularly concerning as the delays escalated during the 2020 Presidential election and delayed the receipt and return of mail-in ballots.

And we want to make sure those delays do not recur during this midterm election.

We've seen related to these service issues, closures of post offices which close without notice during the day due to staff shortages or other issues. That means a small business owner or employee who runs to the post office during her lunch break cannot pay bills or mail products to a consumer or customer.

In a related service issue, we've seen increases in postal mail theft and crime. Municipalities and constituents alike have come to me with stories of stolen checks that have been washed and repurposed for different amounts to different payees. So we need to examine why Postmaster DeJoy has prioritized eliminating postal police.

Public concern about check theft then relates back to the fact that it's all the more important that people are able to get in-per-

son services at their post offices. And last, I want to raise the long-standing inaccessibility issues at the Chester, Pennsylvania Post Office in Delaware County, which my constituent, Susan Dennis, spoke to in the video at the outset.

That post office was built in 1937, 85 years ago and has not been renovated significantly since then. It has no publicly accessible ramps or lifts, effectively barring customers with mobility impairment from transacting businesses. This isn't a small facility. It serves a city of more than 30,000, a majority-minority community with a poverty rate in excess of 30 percent. Many of whom are dependent on public transit and services that can be accessed through the post office.

I've contacted the USPS about this repeatedly for the past year and, in particular, have asked that the Postal Service give full and fair consideration to doing a retrofit for the facility, a request that the Postal Service has ignored. So I'm deeply concerned that there's no plan, long-term plan, to address these discretionary accessibility upgrades.

I'm, once again, requesting that the Postal Service address these concerns by creating a plan to do so. And I will be sending a letter, along with Chairman Connolly, and thank you for his interest immediately following this hearing.

Our veterans, our seniors, our municipal authorities rely upon the Postal Service as an essential public service and it's important that it be able to serve everyone.

Thank you.

Mr. CONNOLLY. Thank you so much, Congresswoman Scanlon. And thank you for your particular focus on the Chester Post Office in Delaware County. We really appreciate your commitment to your constituents in trying to make sure that everyone has access.

The distinguished gentlelady from the Commonwealth of Pennsylvania, Madeleine Dean, is recognized for any opening statement she may have.

Ms. DEAN. Thank you, Mr. Chairman. I'm Madeleine Dean. I represent the fourth congressional district, Montgomery and Berks Counties. I want my counties to get their fair shout out.

Thank you, Mr. Connolly, for bringing this important oversight hearing to Philadelphia, a field hearing on the important issues surrounding the Postal Service, access to the Postal Service to all of our constituents and I'm very pleased that you chose to have it here at Temple University, home to my—it's my husband's alma mater, so thank you, Temple, for having us here today.

I want to start by saying my admiration for the Postal Service, for those who work in and around the Postal Service.

You are critically important to all of us. We learned that, perhaps, the harder way through a pandemic, through COVID, and a global economic closure, but it really reminds me of the Postal Service's roots that you so eloquently described, Mr. Connolly.

Ben Franklin, before the formation of this country, was a part of the Postal Service deputy postmaster and he wanted to make it more democratic, with a small D. More egalitarian. We're here today to say let's go back and take a look. Is the Postal Service able to operate in that egalitarian way to serve all of our residents?

Like everyone here, my constituents service case work around the Postal Service is way up this year. To date we are three times the number of Postal Service cases as of all of last year, three times the number and it's just September.

Some of the complaints that we are hearing are work force shortages, of course, the chronic problem of not enough, not consistent daily delivery, not consistent hours of operation in some of our post offices, the worry of closure or consolidation of post offices making the Postal Service farther from my constituents. Critically important, as we saw in the past election, was the protection of and speedy delivery of mail-in ballots. Like my colleagues here, mail theft has been a complaint among my interestingly my tax collectors have called us to say incoming receipts of taxes have been missing, COVID relief and stimulus checks missing, prescriptions delayed or missing.

So what I'm here to say is, I'm interested in finding out what works and what doesn't work. And I'm proud to be part of the reform for the Postal Service and making sure we hold leadership accountable.

Again, welcome to Philadelphia. It's so good to be here at the birthplace of the Postal Service, and I thank all of our witnesses.

I yield back.

Mr. CONNOLLY. Thank you, Congresswoman Dean. And thank you for your commitment, and we look forward to working with you as well. Last, but certainly not least, the Congresswoman who, in fact, represents Chester County, Chrissy Houlahan. Welcome, Congresswoman Houlahan.

Ms. HOULAHAN. Very, very proudly represents Chester and Berks County for the shoutout of the day. Thank you, Chairman Connolly, and thank you very much for the subcommittee for bringing this important hearing to the Commonwealth and to this wonderful city of Philadelphia, the city of brotherly love.

My district, as you mentioned, is Chester and Berks County. I serve the sixth congressional district. It's about 45 minutes from here is the beginning of the district between Valley Forge and the mushroom farms of Kennett Square and it stretches all the way up to the city of Reading.

I have the opportunity to be able to represent that district and I'm enormously proud of it, but in my community, seniors are depending, just like you've heard from other people, on the post office for deliveries like prescription drugs or rural businesses are counting on us to be able to deliver goods and services. Students are relying on the Postal Service for voting by mail and, of course, veterans like myself are also reliant on the mail for a lot of other service deliveries as well.

Listen, you're going to hear, you have heard the same thing over and over again. So I don't want to beat a dead horse, but in Oxford, Pennsylvania, in my community, the post office has been shuttered in the middle of the day due to lack of staff and facilities like Mary Gay mentioned, Representative Scanlon mentioned, are literally falling apart in places like West Chester in my district. They don't have accessible access for people with disabilities.

So I'm here at this hearing to try to get some answers on behalf of my constituents and my community who really depend on this very critical government service.

I'm really grateful to see both sides of the aisle today coming together once again, to understand and seek out those common-sense solutions to the challenges that we face in our Postal Service.

With that, I will say this year, tens of thousands of Pennsylvanians will be using our Postal Service as was mentioned earlier to deliver their ballots for November's elections. However, our Commonwealth in my community deserves a well-functioning Postal Service each and every day, regardless of the month, of the year, or the particular day of the week. I want very much to thank our witnesses today for shedding light on how we can ensure that the post office remains a reliable and accessible source of mail delivery for everyone. I very much look forward to our conversation.

I will end with 45 seconds to spare and yield that to the service of the committee. Thank you very much, Chairman, for the opportunity to speak.

Mr. CONNOLLY. Thank you so much, Ms. Houlahan. And thank you for mentioning the bipartisan nature of how we have responded to this set of issues in Congress because that's true. The Postal Reform Act that was passed into law this year after 16 long years of struggle was a bipartisan bill and we really appreciate that. And Mr. Fitzpatrick certainly played a role in that as well on the Republican side.

So I think that's really important that we—these are issues that face our constituents and they don't have a Democrat or Republican label to them.

We are now going to hear from our witnesses. I thank you for your patience. We have 11 members participating in this hearing, including the United States Senator, Mr. Casey. That is unusual to have that kind of level of participation in a field hearing.

And so we wanted to make sure everyone, especially those representing this area, had an opportunity to lay out for their constituents and for all of us how they saw this set of issues and how it's affecting their constituents. We have four witnesses and I'm going to ask all of our witnesses present to stand and raise their right hand and the witness, Mr. Vaccarella, I guess, who's on Zoom—who's on Zoom? I'm sorry. Vaccarella, if you'd raise your right hand as well, it is the custom of this subcommittee to swear in witnesses.

Do you swear to tell the truth, the whole truth, and nothing but the truth so help you God?

Let the record show all of our witnesses have answered in the affirmative. Thank you so much.

Our first witness today will be Gary Vaccarella, the region's district manager for the Postal Service. Then we'll hear from Melinda Perez, who's testified before the subcommittee before, who's the assistant inspector general for audit at the U.S. Postal Service, Office of Inspector General. Then we'll hear from Ivan Butts, National President of the National Association of Postal Supervisors and a son of Philadelphia where his career began. Finally, will hear from Frank Albergo, National President of the Postal Police Officers As-

sociation, which has a lot of issues in front of it that concern all of us.

The Postal Service also has additional subject matter experts available on our Zoom platform to respond to member questions that may be outside of Mr. Vaccarella's expertise. Those additional experts are Peter Rendina, deputy chief inspector of the U.S. Postal Inspection Service, Adrienne Marshall, director of the election and government mail, David Webster, senior director processing operations for the Postal Services Chesapeake division.

So with that, I would now call upon Mr. Vaccarella for his five minutes of testimony. Mr. Vaccarella.

**STATEMENT OF GARY VACCARELLA, DE-PA2 DISTRICT
MANAGER, U.S. POSTAL SERVICE**

Mr. VACCARELLA. Thank you. Good morning, Chairman Connolly, Ranking Member Hice, Acting Ranking Member Fitzpatrick, members of the subcommittee, and members of the Pennsylvania delegation.

Thank you for the opportunity to discuss our commitment to service excellent. Our preparedness for the upcoming 2022 election cycle and our initiatives to protect the safety and security of the mail system and those who work in it. We recognize that your constituents depend on the Postal Service for timely and reliable mail service.

My name is Gary Vaccarella. I am currently the district manager for the Delaware/Pennsylvania 2 District. Began my postal career as a clerk in 1985 at the Fort Pierce, Florida post office. Previously served as the district manager of western New York district, postmaster of Baltimore, Maryland, postmaster of Orlando, Florida, and various other leadership positions throughout the organization. Also joining me today are colleagues from processing operation, election, and government mail, and the United States Postal Service, who will answer subject specific questions you may have.

Service performance in Pennsylvania is strong. My district and the Pennsylvania 1 district constantly rank among the highest performing districts in the country with recent service scores reliably exceeding 90 percent for mail and packaged products.

In fact, to further illustrate our reliability, the current average day to deliver mail in Pennsylvania when compared to pre-pandemic averages has remained steady for first-class mail and has improved for marketing mail.

Flight path challenges in some areas of Pennsylvania customers can reliably expect Postal Service to deliver mail and packages in a timely manner. Where there have been some isolated incidents of past service disruptions due largely to employee availability issues, we have taken proactive steps. These include hiring more carriers, loaning delivery employees from other areas to understaffed units whenever possible and monitoring daily staffing levels.

In Pennsylvania, we have hired 2,962 city carrier assistants, 1,363 rural carrier assistants, and 1,704 postal support employees over the past 12 months. These pre-career representatives of our work force perform the same duties as career carriers and clerks. These positions are often a gateway to career positions.

Turning to election preparedness as highlighted in my written testimony, the Postal Service successfully managed and delivered unprecedented ballot mail buy-ins for the American public during the 2020 election cycle.

On average in 2020, we delivered ballots to voters in 2.1 days and ballots from voters to election officials in just 1.6 days.

We also delivered ballots effectively in 2021. For the 2022-cycle, we have already conducted proactive and robust outreach to state and local election officials, including outreach to election officials in Pennsylvania. So far in 2022, delivery time has been 1.79 days for ballots from election officials to voters and one day to deliver completed ballots from voters to election officials.

Regarding mail security and employee safety. It is a top priority for the organization. We share community concerns about recent increases in mail theft from collection boxes and robberies of letter carriers in Pennsylvania and other areas of the country.

The U.S. Postal Inspection Service is a Federal law enforcement and security arm of the Postal Service, and postal inspectors are authorized to investigate and make arrests both on and off postal premises. Postal inspectors work to bring offenders to justice and make thousands arrests each year. Inspection service is also working to improve collection box security with key and lock enhancements.

We are aware of legislative proposals to expand the jurisdiction of postal police officers, or PPOs. However, PPOs are assigned to certain facilities because the inspection service has determined that these facilities require the presence of uniformed, trained, and armed officers.

Removing those officers from Postal Service property would increase the security risks to those facilities. Inspection service determined that allowing PPOs to patrol the streets would not decrease mail theft or improve letter carrier safety. It is the role of the postal inspectors to investigate these crimes. PPOs serve as a vital role in the security of the Nation's mail system and that function should not be compromised through a modification of authority that would be tracked from the protection of the greatest number of postal employees, customers, and property.

In conclusion, service performance in Pennsylvania has improved since the height of the pandemic and our national and state service force for first-class mail, marketing mail, and competitive products remain strong. The Postal Service also stands ready to ensure successful 2022 election cycle. Moreover, the inspection service is faithfully executing their mission to protect the Nation's mail.

I want to thank the members of the subcommittee and members of the Pennsylvania delegation for holding this hearing. The supporting witnesses and I look forward to your questions.

Mr. CONNOLLY. Thank you very much, Mr. Vaccarella.

Ms. Perez, you are now recognized for your five minutes of testimony, and I should note, all of your full statements will, of course, be entered into the record in full.

Ms. Perez?

**STATEMENT OF MELINDA PEREZ, ASSISTANT INSPECTOR
GENERAL FOR AUDIT, U.S. POSTAL SERVICE OFFICE OF IN-
SPECTOR GENERAL**

Ms. PEREZ. Thank you, and good morning, Chairman Connolly, Ranking Member Hice, Acting Ranking Member Fitzpatrick, members of the subcommittee, and the Pennsylvania delegation.

Thank you for inviting me here today to discuss our work related to the Postal Service's delivery performance and efforts to address mail theft.

Our mission is to ensure the efficiency, accountability, and integrity in our Nation's Postal Service. We take our mission very seriously.

Looking at service performance starting in Fiscal Year 2018, Philadelphia's scores were relatively close to the national average for most categories of mail until the fall of 2020. Then the timeliness of mail delivery in Philadelphia experienced a significant decline.

While the Nation overall experienced mail delays during this time, Philadelphia was hit especially hard. Service performance in Philadelphia has improved since that time, and the most recently released data shows its First Class mail scores are near or above the national average. However, there may still be problems with mail delays in certain locations.

Philadelphia was not alone in facing major service disruptions in the winter of 2020. We looked at service performance in 17 districts, including Philadelphia, over this timeframe.

The specific issues we identified in Philadelphia were similar to what we found in other locations: problems with employee availability, loss of capacity to move mail on commercial networks, and dot congestion contributing to mail being sent late to other postal facilities.

We know timely mail delivery is important to the American public. In response to concerns, we stood up a new audit group, the field operations review team, to conduct targeted facility reviews in locations with service challenges.

As part of these reviews, we perform a cluster of audits, visiting one mail processing plant and three to four post offices at the same time.

This allows us to get a better understanding of issues that span both processing and delivery, an increasingly important focus of our work now that these functions fall under different postal executives.

These reviews provide quick evaluations, ensuring timely and meaningful results to Postal Service management and our stakeholders.

This year we completed site visits at eight clusters in the western and central areas of the country and found issues related to late and extra trips, scanning performance, delayed mail, cluttered processing floors, and poor facility conditions at many retail and delivery units.

Our work in Fiscal Year 2023 will focus on the southern and eastern parts of the country, including the Philadelphia area.

Timely mail delivery becomes even more important as elections draw near. We have an open audit looking at the Postal Service's readiness for the 2022 midterm election.

In addition to conducting observations at postal facilities, we are evaluating whether the Postal Service effectively took corrective action in response to our prior recommendations.

In addition, as we have done in the past, we will be conducting field visits across the country in the weeks leading up to and the week prior to the midterm elections. We will provide the Postal Service near real-time feedback and subsequently publish a report on our findings.

Along with service challenges, mail theft is also a growing concern. We recently initiated an audit that will analyze trends and evaluate the efforts the Postal Service and Postal Inspection Service are taking to prevent and respond to mail theft.

Our Office of Investigations also focuses significant efforts in this area. We have several recent investigations into mail theft by postal employees around Philadelphia, involving stolen Treasury checks and gift cards.

One cause of recent increases in mail theft is the challenge around arrow key accountability as we reported in August 2020.

Arrow keys are used by postal workers to open blue collection boxes and neighborhood delivery box units. Subjects are stealing arrow keys or approaching postal employees and offering to pay them to sell or loan them their keys.

To address this issue, our Office of Investigations has initiated Operation Secure Arrow, a multi-faceted effort to identify and investigate employees involved in the theft and mishandling of arrow keys. This includes employing data analytics, focusing on employees who are misusing arrow keys, and collaborating with the inspection service.

We currently have 20 open investigations related to this problem, and these investigations have already resulted in five criminal prosecutions and seven administrative actions.

Sending and receiving mail without fear of it being delayed or stolen is critical to an effective postal system. We appreciate the opportunity to discuss our work, and I am happy to answer your questions.

Mr. CONNOLLY. Thank you so much, Ms. Perez.

Mr. Butts, you are recognized for your five minutes of summary testimony. Welcome.

STATEMENT OF IVAN BUTTS, PRESIDENT, NATIONAL ASSOCIATION OF POSTAL SUPERVISORS

Mr. BUTTS. Thank you, Mr. Chairman. Chairman Connolly, and members of the committee, thank you for inviting me to provide the views of the National Association of Postal Supervisors regarding postal performance and the safety and security of postal personnel, property, and the mail.

My name is Ivan Butts. I am honored to serve as president of the National Association of Postal Supervisors, representing approximately 48,000 postal supervisors, managers, and postmasters.

Chairman Connolly, permit me to thank you for your leadership in championing two pieces of legislation that are important to

NAPS members—H.R. 1623, the Postal Managers and Supervisors Fairness Act, and H.R. 1624, the Postal Employees Appeal Rights Amendment Act.

These measures provide fairness and paid consultation and due process rights to executive and administrative schedule postal employees.

As we approach the 2022 election season, absentee ballots continue to be a popular and secure alternative to in-person voting. For this reason, NAPS supports H.R. 1307, the Vote by Mail Tracking Act, which would require each state to use a standard envelope design and distinct barcode that enables the tracking of each individual ballot.

Postal performance is immensely important to NAPS members. As such, NAPS is concerned about the effects of the USPS recently announced plan to consolidate and realign mail processing operations throughout the country.

Members of Congress from Pennsylvania should know this proposal would impact mail processing and delivery in southeast Pennsylvania throughout—through the consolidation of 12 USPS associated offices into the tri-county facility.

We believe, consistent with the law, the Postal Service should be transparent with regards to the reasons it's deciding to initiate this plan, what are the specific goals of the plan, what are the cost savings. If so, how much will be saved, and how will success be measured.

NAPS contends that these are requirements of the Postal Accountability and Enhancement Act, as well as the agency's handbook, PO-408408.

The delivery unit optimization plan initiated by the Postal Service in 2010 and revised in 2013 exhibits the same operational objectives as the soon-to-be-implemented Sort and Delivery Center consolidation plan.

In August 2014, the Postal Inspector General casts serious doubts about the projected cost savings attributed to Duo.

In addition, the IG recorded the USPS' failure to comply with guidelines and inability to provide a rationale for specific consolidations.

Furthermore, the IG made recommendations related to the Duo plan. However, the Post Office dismissed those recommendations.

Duo was the prolog for two other postal actions that slowed mail delivery down, post plan, in reduced service to rural carriers and the plant consolidations which caused mail service to fall off the cliff.

NAPS is calling on congressional oversight necessary to ensure that the present, proposed consolidation and realignment plan is not Duo on steroids.

Oversight is necessary to ensure that the USPS plans will not increase USPS expenses. Consequently, we request the Congress to require the Postal Service to suspend the plan until a transparent and comprehensive analysis can be completed.

Finally, the security of the mail and the protection of postal personnel and property is under threat. Two years ago, the Postal Inspection Service narrowed the Postal Police Force's authority, restricting it to investigating only crimes committed on postal prop-

erty. This change exposed postal employees, postal vehicles, and mail to crime.

Representatives Garbarino and Norton introduced legislation clarifying Federal law authorization, authorizing Postal Police to protect postal personnel, postal property, and U.S. Mail beyond the perimeter of postal-owned and leased properties.

Our support of such legislation came with a price. With me today is retired Police Captain Butch Maynard, the President of NAPS Branch 51, who we believe was forced to retire from his position in the Postal Police due to the Inspection Service retaliation against him for support of the Postal Police legislation.

The Postal Inspection Service conducted a nationwide review of Postal Police divisions that culminated with the abolishment of one of its division—the Newark division, the division managed by Captain Maynard. These operations were transferred to a smaller division here in Philadelphia.

Captain Maynard was the only management employee negatively impacted by the realignment. NAPS believes the act of retaliation against him for the lawful exercising of his First Amendment Acts is worthy of further congressional inquiry.

Mr. Chairman, thank you for the opportunity to appear before you today. NAPS looks forward to working with the committee to sustain a vital, sustainable, and vibrant post office. I look forward to your questions.

Mr. CONNOLLY. Thank you so much, Mr. Butts. We appreciate your testimony, and we will followup.

Mr. Alberg, you're our fourth and final witness. You are recognized for your five minutes of summary testimony. Welcome.

STATEMENT OF FRANK ALBERGO, NATIONAL PRESIDENT, POSTAL POLICE OFFICERS ASSOCIATION

Mr. ALBERGO. Good morning, Chairman Connolly, and the other members attending today's hearing. On behalf of the Nation's Postal Police officers, we thank you for calling attention to the dramatic rise in mail theft experienced by so many Americans, as well as equally disturbing trend in violent crimes perpetrated against postal employees.

My name is Frank Alberg, and I serve as the national president of the Postal Police Officers Association. The PPOA represents uniform Postal Police officers employed by the United States Postal Inspection Service.

The Postal Police force began at this very location, Philadelphia's Temple University, which on December 9th of 1970, graduated the first class of 30 Postal Police officers.

Simply put, wherever and whenever Postal Police officers have been deployed, an immediate and significant reduction in postal-related crime results.

The Inspection Service has two kind of law enforcement officers—Postal Police officers, also referred to as PPOs, and postal inspectors. The roles of PPOs and postal inspectors are akin to uniformed police officers and plain-clothed detectives in a municipal police force.

Postal inspectors are among the best criminal investigators working today. However, they show up after crimes have been committed and the scene secure.

By contrast, PPOs deter postal crimes so that costly followup investigations become unnecessary.

In short, PPOs specialize in crime prevention, not after-the-fact criminal investigations.

In fact, protecting postal workers and the U.S. Mail, away from postal property was once the core function of the Postal Police Force.

Despite the well documented success of Postal Police patrols, in 2020, the Postal Service stripped Postal Police officers of their law enforcement authority and began gutting the Postal Police Force.

This was done during a pay dispute with the PPOA and three months before a national election.

Once 2,700 officers strong, Postal Police ranks have been decimated to approximately 350 rank-and-file officers. In fact, our police force has been reduced by 20 percent since 2020.

During his recent state of the Union Address, President Biden said, we should all agree, the answer is not to defund the police. The answer is to fund the police with the resources and training they need to protect our communities.

Apparently, the Postal Service thinks the President is wrong. Indeed, the Postal Service is actively defunding its uniform police force. Here are the facts.

After 50 years, the Inspection Service revoked the policing power of Postal Police officers while they are away from postal real property.

After 50 years, all proactive, Postal Police mail theft prevention and letter carrier protection patrols have been eliminated.

After 50 years, the Inspection Service has prohibited PPOs from responding to any and all postal-related crimes occurring away from postal real estate.

Nineteen of 21 Postal Police divisions are severely below the budgeted complement. Nationwide rank-and-file PPOs are at less than 62 percent of the budgeted complement.

The Inspection Service has eliminated entire Postal Police tours in Detroit, Memphis, Oakland, San Francisco, St. Louis, Washington, DC, and even here in Philadelphia.

In other words, for the first time in 50 years, Postal Police operations no longer support 24-hour policing coverage.

Since 2020, the PPO attrition rate has far exceeded the hiring rate, and there is absolutely no plan to reverse the trend.

In March 2021, the Postal Service paid for a private contractor, Booz Allen Hamilton, to rubber-stamp the absurd recommendation to eliminate nearly all Postal Police divisions and positions.

Given our attrition rate, in all likelihood, there will be fewer than 300 rank-and-file PPOs by the year 2024 unless changes are made. The current structure of the Postal Inspection Service has almost four times the number of postal inspectors as bargaining unit PPOs.

Plainly, the Inspection Service has it backward. It is simply better, in every respect, to prevent crime than investigate crime. For

every postal inspector hired, the Postal Service could've hired two PPOs are drastically less cost.

Many of the crimes targeting our Nation's letter carriers and the U.S. Mail could be prevented by simply having PPOs patrol specific areas with high rates of postal crime.

This is not a novel idea. Local Postal Inspection Service managers have continuously expressed the need to hire more PPOs and then utilize those officers to protect postal employees and the mail away from postal facilities.

In other words, the people on the ground, the people who actually manage local Inspection Service operations, believe that deploying PPOs away from postal facilities can and will make a difference.

The Postal Service, perhaps America's most beloved Federal institution, is in peril. Postal crime has spiraled out of control, postal workers are being attacked, and mail is being stolen at unprecedented levels.

It is obvious that the Postal Inspection Service is doing very little about it. In fact, the Inspection Service has begun the process of defunding its uniform police force during an unparalleled postal crime wave.

Americans deserve to have their mail protected, and postal employees deserve to feel safe while they're at work. The Postal Service must effectively utilize all of its resources to stop the plague of mail theft and stop the attacks on postal workers.

It is obvious to everyone, except the Postal Service, that Postal Police officers are the most effective resource to accomplish this goal.

In 1772, Pennsylvania's own Benjamin Franklin, in effect, created the Inspection Service, making it America's first and oldest law enforcement agency. It's time that the Inspection Service realign its priorities and enter into the 21st century of policing and law enforcement.

Mr. CONNOLLY. Thank you, Mr. Alberg. And it is indeed an odd law enforcement strategy to have skyrocketing crime rates, both personal violence and theft rates among customers, and the solution is to shrink the police forces charged with trying to solve those crimes and deter them. We'll explore that during this hearing.

Before we get into questioning—and Ms. Norton will go first—I want to recognize George Kenney, representing Temple University. We want to thank Temple University for their extraordinary hospitality. They're providing refreshment, they're providing extraordinary staff support, and your welcome could not be warmer and more hospitable.

George, what would you like to say on behalf of Temple University?

Mr. KENNEY. Chairman Connolly, thank you for visiting Temple, I know this is your first visit, and welcome back to my friends of the Pennsylvania delegation. They've all been here before.

Temple, one of Pennsylvania's largest public research institutions, happy to have you here, you're welcome back anytime. You and your staff have been great to work with.

Just for a fun fact, we have about 40,000 students. I hope you get a chance to spend a little time on campus today and see the

activity. But most of all, thank you for the support the Pennsylvania—U.S. House of Representatives has given higher ed, both for the benefited students and the research dollars you send across America to benefit all Americans. So thank you for your work. Thank you.

Mr. CONNOLLY. Thank you so much, George, and thank you again to everybody associated with Temple University for your extraordinary hospitality. We could not do this today without your support and help, and it's been wonderful, so thank you.

The chair now recognizes the Congresswoman from the District of Columbia, Eleanor Holmes Norton, for her five minutes of questioning.

Ms. NORTON. Thank you again, Chairman Connolly, for holding this important hearing.

Mail theft has become a large issue in the Nation's capital, right here in the District of Columbia, particularly the theft of checks through stolen universal keys. My questions are going to be for Mr. Albergo.

I understand that several regions of the Postal Service—of the Postal Police rather, had believed they had the statutory authority to protect the mail, postal property, and postal employees wherever they are located.

However, the Postal Service has recently told all Postal Police officers they do not have this authority, but instead their police powers are limited to Postal Service real property.

According to the Postal Police's authorizing statute, they have—and I'm quoting here—duty in connection with the protection of property owned or occupied by the Postal Service under the charge and control of the Postal Service and persons on that property.

Mr. Albergo, am I correct that that authority does not appear to limit the Postal Service's authority to Postal Service real property, but could include protecting mail trucks and postal staff as they travel, and, of course, the mail itself?

Mr. ALBERGO. Yes. The Inspection Service has historically interpreted statute as meaning that PPOs could protect mail, postal workers, postal assets no matter location.

In the summer of 2020, they decided to restrict that jurisdiction. It's inexplicable.

What sort of law enforcement agency doesn't want their police officers protecting employees? What sort of law enforcement agency doesn't want their law enforcement officers to have the power to do their jobs?

It's—it's—it's—I'm as confused as anyone else. It doesn't make any sense.

Ms. NORTON. Well, we must correct that right away.

Mr. Albergo, could you explain why it is important for the Postal Police to have the authority to protect the mail and postal property and employees even off of Postal Service real property?

Mr. ALBERGO. PPOs, or Postal Police officers, are uniform police officers. There's no dispute that police officers deter crime. Everyone accepts that fact except, apparently, the Postal Service.

If we are deployed to specific areas where there is mail theft, where there are attacks on postal workers, it will deter crime. It's just a fact. People will not—or I should say criminals—criminals

will not see a postal police officer in a conspicuously marked vehicle and say, oh, I think today's a good time to rob a letter carrier. It just doesn't happen.

It's—it's inexplicable. I know I'm saying that a lot, but I just can't explain why the Inspection Service did this.

Ms. NORTON. Actually, I'm very concerned because I thought I heard witnesses say there weren't any Postal Police here in the District of Columbia. If so, I've got to attend to that right away.

I thank you again, Mr. Albergo, and I thank you, Chairman Connolly. This is an important issue as we confront the widespread mail theft throughout the country. Thank you again.

Mr. CONNOLLY. I thank the distinguished Congresswoman from the District of Columbia, and I would ask unanimous consent, following up on her line of questioning, to insert in the record several articles dealing with this issue: One headed, did the U.S. Postal Service pave the way for a surge in thefts by muzzling its own police; another, the stolen mail scheme now targeting a wealthy D.C. suburb; and a third, how cyber criminals turn paper checks stolen from mailboxes into Bitcoin.

And I would ask, without objection, that they be entered into the record at this point.

Without objection, so ordered.

The gentleman from Philadelphia, Mr. Fitzpatrick, is recognized for his line of questioning.

Mr. FITZPATRICK. Thank you, Chairman Connolly, to all of our witnesses, thank you for being here today. My first question for Mr. Vaccarella, thank you, sir, for joining us, and I want to start by thanking you for your response to our letter that myself and several of my colleagues here had sent you last month, specific to postal delivery issues in our communities and related hiring practices in USPS.

Several months ago, as the chairman had indicated, Congress passed the Postal Reform Act. I wanted to focus specific on the recruitment and retention issues that I referenced in my opening statement, and specific to those issues but also even more specifically in the D.A.—I'm sorry—DE-PA2 postal district, which many of us represent.

How will that piece of legislation impact, positively or negatively, recruitment and retention, which is really the genesis for a lot of the challenges that have encompassed the postal delivery service and its employees and also its customers?

Mr. VACCARELLA. Yes, thank you. Thank you, Congressman. You know, we recognize the need for much more energy and attention on our retention of our employees, and we have initiatives that are addressing retention of our employees.

Our new employees, you know, we are giving them extra training. We are limiting their work hours within the first two weeks, within the first 30 days, within the first 60 to 90 days.

And then even after their 90-day probation period, we are limiting their work hours as well. We have much oversight on that, and we do recognize the importance of addressing the retention of our new employees.

Mr. FITZPATRICK. Thank you, Mr. Vaccarella.

Mr. Albergo, ensuring the secure delivery of letters and packages obviously needs to be a top Federal priority. Our Problem Solvers Caucus recently endorsed porch pirates legislation to make it a Federal crime to remove packages from porches through theft or other means.

Obviously, Americans must be able to rely on the post office to deliver essentials and also while protecting privacy and safety in the process.

What do you believe the greatest challenges are facing Postal Police officers right now, and what can we do, moving forward, to guarantee and improve both postal inspection and postal security?

Mr. ALBERGO. The Postal Police Force has been decimated. We need more PPOs. I mean, that's right off the bat.

Second, we need our jurisdiction restored.

Third, the Inspection Service—and I can't believe I have to say this—the Inspection Service needs to understand that policing, a law enforcement officer, a uniformed police officer, deters crime.

They seem to be more interested in investigating crime than deterring it. Investigations are costly. Prosecutions are costly. Incarceration is very costly. It's much more cost-effective to deter the crime in the first place.

I think they need to realign their priorities. I think they need to invest more heavily in crime prevention rather than investigations.

The mission statement is very clear. It's crime prevention, it's protection, it's security, in addition to investigations.

Mr. FITZPATRICK. Thank you, Mr. Albergo, and I will give a personal plug to the postal inspectors. As an FBI agent, it was a complete joy to work with them, true professionals, always advanced their investigations, always so cooperative. So I'm a big supporter of that program.

Mr. Chairman, I yield back.

Mr. CONNOLLY. If the gentleman would yield just for one second, I completely support what he just said, and I would point out to Mr. Albergo's response to your question, there were over 300,000 theft complaints by constituents, by consumers, in the last reporting period. Less than one-half of 1 percent were investigated. And as Mr. Albergo said, that's expensive.

I'd love to see what the statistic is, well, how many ultimately got prosecuted and how many convictions were there.

But essentially, we're now approaching a point where this is a cost-free crime. You know, your chances of being investigated, being prosecuted, being pursued, being convicted, and ultimately serving any kind of either jail time or compensation is close to nil. And that is a very dangerous situation in which to be, and it certainly does not protect our constituents.

I thank my friend for yielding.

Mrs. Lawrence, did you wish to go next?

Mrs. LAWRENCE. Yes. Thank you, Mr. Chairman.

Mr. CONNOLLY. You're recognized for your five minutes.

Mrs. LAWRENCE. Thank you. I would like to direct my question to Mr. Butts.

Being a former postal employee and being a supervisor, there were times when, in the processing facilities, I had to ask for the

support and backup of Postal Police to adhere to a situation, to diffuse a situation.

Because we are the second largest employer in the United States, we have a massive diverse work force. So my question to you, when we start having this discussion about the support of our Postal Police, where does the postal supervisors weigh in on this? And I would like to hear your opinion on that.

Mr. BUTTS. Thank you for that question, Congresswoman. The postal supervisors are 100 percent in favor of a strong Postal Police officer work force, not just available in the plants but also doing the routine things that they always were doing before they were directed not to do so.

And that was make routine patrols, that was to go out to some of the—the offices that were in more challenging areas, to provide periodic visits or periodic support. Right here in Philadelphia in some, and right here around in this neighborhood, we have offices that, prior to Postal Police being shut down, were not allowed to open or close unless the Postal Police were on premise because of the crime rates in those areas.

So they've lost that protection by this initiative. So NAPS fully supports having a strong Postal Police officer work force out in the field, working and protecting our personnel, our property, and the mail.

Mrs. LAWRENCE. I just want to add, Mr. Chairman, one of the duties that were performed by our Postal Police was the securing of people who entered our building, the security of employees coming in and out of the building.

In large urban areas, the vehicles that we parked on postal facilities were subject to auto theft, and just their patrolling of the area as employees—massive number of employees walking back and forth throughout the streets outside of the facility, was a deterrent.

And I just want to be clear the expectations that are there for our employees who are first responders, we found out during the pandemic, that they are needed to work regardless of the situations, and that we have that sense of when our loved ones and our citizens go to work that they're in a protected and safe environment.

And the issue that I'm concerned about, when I, as a supervisor, could not call the Postal Police to diffuse a situation or to be there for multiple reasons.

We know mental health is real, and we are very diverse employer in the Postal Service. And we have to deal with day-to-day issues. Is that now the responsibility of the supervisor? How do we—and then when we, the Postal Inspection Service, as is stated, they investigate.

So I am very concerned that we are leaving our postal supervisors in an area where they are exposed to deescalating or dealing with situations that happen in work environments. And I'm also concerned about my workers who are going and walking in communities in high urban areas where there are data that shows that crime is very high. This is a very, very important issue, and I thank you and I yield back.

Mr. CONNOLLY. I thank the gentle lady.

Mr. Boyle is recognized for his five minutes of questioning.

Mr. BOYLE. Yes, well, thank you. I want to thank all of the witnesses. I especially want to welcome Ivan back home, my fellow die-hard Philadelphia Eagles fan. He and I both carry the banner in Washington, DC, for our home team.

On a different note, I have to say, I'm thinking back to the number of press conferences and meetings that my two colleagues also representing Philadelphia, Dwight Evans, Mary Gay Scanlon, and I had in the fall of 2020—and I was reminded by this actually when you were giving testimony, Ms. Perez—that just coincidentally, the fall of 2020 is when we started to see the enormous disruptions, and the statistics bear that out, in terms of mail delivery in the Philadelphia area.

I can't recall what else was happening fall of 2020, but could you please speak more to that and just how our statistics were so out of whack with the national average?

Ms. PEREZ. Sure. As I mentioned in my opening statement, we found that in the Philadelphia area, the mail delivery had—was below the national average. So as I also mentioned in my opening statement, the averages have improved here in the Philadelphia area, but we are continuing to conduct work and oversight in this area to ensure that they stay that way.

And we will be actually conducting work in the Philadelphia and Delaware regions in the beginning of Fiscal Year 2023, conducting those cluster audits that I mentioned, which will look at areas around the delivery, the processing, and the transportation of the mail to see if there's a nexus with regards to any issues up or downstream.

Mr. BOYLE. Thank you, Ms. Perez.

I do want to point out, as you're aware but many others might not be, when we compare these statistics, we do have to be careful because one of the reasons—one of the ways in which Postmaster General DeJoy has been able to play with these stats is that before, First Class mail delivery used to mean 2 to 3 days, and now, correct me if I'm wrong, Chairman Connolly, but it now means 4 to 5 days.

So when we're comparing had statistics to yesteryear, we're not comparing apples to apples and oranges to oranges.

Would you, from your vantage point, be able to discuss why it is that in this year, 2022, my office has received far more complaints than even the pandemic years?

And I believe when my colleague from Montgomery County, Ms. Dean, gave her testimony, she cited the exact same thing, and she happens to represent the suburbs. So that points to the fact that there is something going on here that, again, is independent of the pandemic.

Ms. PEREZ. So we are aware that there is an uptick in customer complaints. I don't believe Philadelphia is unique in that, and unfortunately, I wouldn't be able to discuss specifically as far as what the causes—the root causes are to that increase, but again as I mentioned, we'll be doing work in the Philadelphia and Delaware regions coming up in 2023, and those are some of the things that we can look into.

Mr. BOYLE. Well, thank you, I appreciate that and look forward to staying in touch with you and your office for an update because

as I mentioned, I mean, this is—we're three years, we're in the third year into dealing with some of these issues that have been chronic, obviously, in our region.

Mr. Butts, I wanted to turn it over to you, and if you could talk from the perspective of someone who represents the postal supervisors, and you talked about this a little bit in your opening statement, but I wanted to give you the opportunity to elaborate on the sort of changes the postal supervisors have seen because they're right there, day in and day out, and can speak to it in a way that perhaps the statistics don't do justice.

Mr. BUTTS. Thank you for that, Congressman. As you stated with the service scores and that the changing of the service scores has still brought upon still parity, not really achieving service that you would have expected that it would.

So we have to keep in mind that over 600 pieces of mail processing equipment were taken out of the system a few years ago, so that was fire power that's going to impact the Postal Service forever in trying to maintain service standards because now we just don't have that capability anymore, to process the mail timely. So that's going to be a challenge.

We do have a challenge with employee—I heard some mention about employee, I heard some mention about employee retention. We have a serious issue with employee retention that I think is not being addressed as aggressively as it should.

Again, to take a new employee and then put them on a guaranteed route with guaranteed hours does not serve operations and getting America's mail delivered.

What we need is a change in our onboarding process, and that's what we've been calling for since this process has been initiated. Our onboarding process is too long. It ends in a couple month period of employee just walking into a workstation without having any real knowledge of the work that's in front of them. And it can be a culture shock if you spend two months getting ready for a job and that—and when you get there, that's not the job that you need to be doing.

So we need to have an onboarding process that puts these candidates in front of their—in front of their leaders, in front of their managers, as soon as possible, so they can bond with them, learn what their jobs are with them, and then deploy out into the field. And that will be a positive impact to the retention that the post office is looking for, we feel.

Again, there are—there are a lot of issues that go into where we are, but retention being the one that's really a stickler for us because, again, it's denying us the resources that we need to get the work—get America's mail delivered.

Mr. CONNOLLY. Thank you, Mr. Butts, and thank you Mr. Boyle.

Mr. Evans, you are recognized for your five minutes of questioning.

Mr. EVANS. Thank you, Mr. Chairman. I kind of want to followup on my colleague to Ms. Perez. My office has received countless complaints of checks being stole at USPS drop boxes, and these are fraudulent cash, wash out, or otherwise lost or stolen.

These thefts are hitting my low-income constituents the hardest, and I have yet to hear a good plan of what is being done to address

this. Why is USPS doing the increased report of checking thefts and fraud in Philadelphia, and I really close with this one, will the Postal Service provide data on how many people have been caught and charged for stealing checks in Philadelphia?

Ms. PEREZ. So as I mentioned in my opening statement, we do have an Office of Investigations who focuses on mail theft. And we have over 500 agents, and 40 percent of our agents actually focus on the area of mail theft.

So I don't have statistics for you at this point. I don't know if my colleague from the Postal Service, Mr. Vaccarella, would have those statistics, but we'd be happy to look at our statistics and get back to you.

Mr. EVANS. But the question—some of that, will the Postal Service provide data on how many people have been caught and charged for stealing checks in Philadelphia?

Ms. PEREZ. Right. I would have to—again, I would have to go back with my colleagues from the Office of Investigations and see what kind of statistics we have to get back to you on that.

Mr. EVANS. OK. But you will provide that to—

Mr. CONNOLLY. Well, would my friend—

Mr. EVANS. Yes.

Mr. CONNOLLY [continuing]. If we could pause his questioning just one second, Ms. Perez, are you telling us you don't know how many—how many violations or suspicions of theft have been prosecuted or pursued with 500—

Ms. PEREZ. In the Philadelphia area?

Mr. CONNOLLY. Is that your question, Philadelphia?

Mr. EVANS. That was specific to mine, Philadelphia.

Mr. CONNOLLY. All right. Because one is looking at the overall statistics, and one is not impressed that we're very aggressive at pursuing anything.

Ms. PEREZ. Right. And one other thing to note is that the Office of Investigations within the Office of Inspector General, we investigate crimes that are committed by postal employees. So if there's a crime that's committed that is a non-postal employee, that would be with the Postal Inspection Service, so we do work closely with the Postal Inspection Service.

And, again, statistically overall, we would have to coordinate to ensure that we have those—that right information to provide.

Mr. CONNOLLY. OK. All right. I just want to make sure it was clarified.

Thank you, my friend, for yielding.

Mr. EVANS. OK. Thank you. I yield back, Mr. Chairman.

Mr. CONNOLLY. I thank the gentleman. And let me just say, Mr. Evans, we will work with you and obviously other members of this delegation, and the whole issue of crime and theft, no postal worker should be subject to violent crime in the pursuit of his or her responsibilities, and no consumer should fear that by using the Postal Service I'm putting myself and that check or that payment at risk because professionals are outwitting us in the process of criminal activity.

So thank you for bringing that issue up, and we'll pursue it.

Ms. Scanlon, you are recognized for your five minutes of questioning.

Ms. SCANLON. Thank you very much.

Mr. Butts, you spoke to an issue of consolidations of sorting and delivery centers, and this is something that just in the past few days my office has gotten a number of questions about from agencies—or from post offices in our area.

As I understand it, this means that sorting and delivery functions are going to be removed from many of our local post offices and consolidated in certain places.

So letter carriers will no longer go to their local facility to pick up mail. They'll have to drive someplace else and pick up the mail. Can you explain a little bit about this? Because it seems to me that that's going to create additional time for those letter carriers. It's going to mean we need more letter carriers, that we are going to need more vehicles because many of these folks now pick up from the local place and then walk. So that seems to have environmental impact as well as some issues with an aging postal fleet. So can you just fill us in a little bit about this?

Mr. BUTTS. Yes, certainly, Congresswoman. Although we just been in the beginning stages of being briefed by the Postal Service on this S and DC initiative they are undertaking, we do have some kind of—at least a glimpse of how it rolls out with the Tri-County facility.

Tri-County facility near King of Prussia already is doing this type of work where they have brought in five associate offices into that facility. So now the carriers, they no longer report to whatever station they were. Whether it was Devon or Berwyn, they now report to Tri-County to begin their day, and they pick up their mail, and then they leave from Tri-County, go travel back to their town, deliver their route, bring their mail, and then bring back—and then come back to Tri-County.

So what we see in that facility is increased, obviously, windshield time because you increase the carriers out on the road and in the vehicles, and you made mention of our vehicle fleet, and so that has some challenges to it also.

And I think now with this S and DC, where it's expanded out to a half hour, you're creating more of that time out on the streets driving now.

And for those of us from Pennsylvania and this area, we can understand the challenges of trying to drive on Lancaster Avenue or Montgomery Avenue or the Schuylkill Expressway at rush hour. So it may be a half hour away, but in the traffic at rush hour, that half hour could easily turn into an hour.

So then you have those things that we don't know if the agency has taken into consideration. But we also know that a half hour away is going to require that some of these routes now have to be split. So now you'll have—instead of one route, it may be two routes. So now that's an additional person, additional vehicle, additional support equipment.

You have some places, I believe in the mid-Hudson area, where they're doing—they're S and DC. They currently have nine routes that are currently walking routes. That means they don't have vehicles. So now you have to have a vehicle to even start out moving these carriers out.

So there's a lot of pieces in here that we really don't have a understanding of what the cost is going to be. I know we've seen something from Protect the Postal Service that projected it could be from \$2 to \$3 billion in additional costs to roll out these facilities, but we don't know because we haven't heard from the agency on that.

Ms. SCANLON. That really feeds into my concern that some of these efficiencies really aren't efficiencies in terms of service or even actual savings for the post office.

Ms. Perez, your agency has studied a number of service issues. Has there been an effort to audit unscheduled office closures, the kind of thing that I think several of us have mentioned, that people go to the post office and they see a sign, a handwritten sign up taped up, sorry, no one's here, we'll be back in an hour?

Ms. PEREZ. So unscheduled office closures, I don't believe, off the top of my head, we have, but as Mr. Butts mentioned, we are finalizing our audit plan for 2023, and we'll be looking at this issue around the sorting and delivery centers, and I can, you know, take back the issue on the unscheduled office closures and get back to you.

Ms. SCANLON. OK. I mean, I am very curious to find out whether this consolidation in the King of Prussia area, how that has played out as we're seeing it supposed to start in the next, you know, few weeks.

And also concerned that your audits may not take place until 2023, when of course we have a midterm election coming up right as, once again, we have a slew of new changes coming in, would seem to at least have the potential for slowing down our mail-in ballots. So very concerned about that impact, so thank you. I yield back.

Mr. CONNOLLY. Thank you, Ms. Scanlon. Thank you for raising that issue, and let me just say, it seems to me, unscheduled closures ought to be so rare as to be exceptional.

And let me ask, Ms. Perez—if I may, Ms. Scanlon, followup to your question—is there a policy in the Postal Service with respect to unscheduled closure?

Ms. PEREZ. I don't know that off the top of my head. I don't know if a colleague from the Postal Service could answer as to whether or not there's a policy, but, you know, again, if we were to receive information with regards to unscheduled office closures, and we felt it was a priority to look at, that's something that we would prioritize and review.

Mr. CONNOLLY. Well, you might at least concede there ought to be a policy if there isn't one?

Ms. PEREZ. Yes.

Mr. CONNOLLY. And that it ought to be a rare event, not a kind of frequent occurrence?

Ms. PEREZ. Again, I would—I would defer to the Postal Service on whether or not there would be particular causes or reasons for making unscheduled office closures, but, yes, as far as informing the public and ensuring that they know that alternative actions with regards to—

Mr. CONNOLLY. Well, I certainly agree with you, there could be reasons—

Ms. PEREZ. Sure.

Mr. CONNOLLY [continuing]. But our focus is on the impact on consumers. We're trying to regularize service and make sure it's predictable and certain and reliable, and not subject to the vagaries of other people's schedules, including postal workers.

Ms. PEREZ. Sure.

Mr. CONNOLLY. And so that gets to Mr. Butts' and Mr. Albergo's point about, frankly, levels of employment and whether we're at full complement, and whether we're really accurately assessing what resources have to go behind what tasks. All right. We look forward to your pursuing that. Thank you.

And thank you, Ms. Scanlon, for bringing that up.

Ms. DEAN, you are recognized for your five minutes of questions.

Ms. DEAN. Thank you, Mr. Chairman, and thank you to our witnesses. As I said, I represent Montgomery and Berks Counties, so my questions are going to focus on my constituent concerns.

Last year, USPS provided a briefing to staff, outlining the plans to address staffing shortages to alleviate the broader disruptions. As I said, three times the number of constituent complaints and we're not three quarters into the year.

We have problems in what is the geographic middle of Montgomery County, King of Prussia, delays in delivery, Bridgeport, complaints of delays in delivery, Conshohocken, complaints of the condition of the Postal Service property.

Let me start maybe with Mr. Vaccarella. We know that work force shortages is a big problem. What are we doing to attract more folks to the work force and to address some of the concerns that Mr. Butts talks about in the onboarding of new postal employees?

Mr. VACCARELLA. Yes, thank you, Congresswoman. We are very aggressively addressing our hiring practices within the district, not only within this district, nationwide.

I can tell you within this district, we have district-led job fairs, at least 20 per month, and then additional postmaster—such as the postmaster of Philadelphia holds additional job fairs. So we are, you know, we are well above 20 job fairs each month—

Ms. DEAN. Are the job fairs producing candidates? Are you getting record numbers of candidates coming forward?

Mr. VACCARELLA. I don't know that I'd say record numbers, but we have hired more than 2,000 carriers, both city carriers and rural carriers over the past 12 months in this district.

Ms. DEAN. And yet we still struggle with work force shortages, am I correct?

Mr. VACCARELLA. We do, for various reasons, yes.

Ms. DEAN. And, Mr. Butts, in terms of what you were talking about, I apologize, I don't know the acronym, S and DC initiative. Can you tell me what that is?

Mr. BUTTS. That's the sorting—sorting and delivery center. Consolidation.

Ms. DEAN. Consolidation. I hate acronyms. Forgive me.

Mr. BUTTS. Yes. We have plenty of them.

Ms. DEAN. Whose initiative is that?

Mr. BUTTS. That initiative is under this administration as led by PMG DeJoy.

Ms. DEAN. And the goal of that initiative, as it was explained, is what?

Mr. BUTTS. Is to consolidate the mail-processing operations of a number of facilities into one central location. And I believe it's supposed to help address with logistics, and it's aligning—realigning the operations.

Ms. DEAN. And yet I have a feeling that, at least anecdotally, what we are all experiencing, what our constituents are experiencing, it's probably contributing to the delays, the disruptions, the problems of mail delivery.

Mr. Albergo, I'm very interested in whatever initiative has been taken to defund Postal Police Service. Where did that come from?

Mr. ALBERGO. I don't actually know. I don't know who in the Postal Service made that decision. Whether it's PMG DeJoy, whether it was the chief postal inspector, Barksdale, I don't know who made this decision.

What I do know is that Mr. DeJoy hasn't done anything to rectify the problem. He hasn't—he hasn't spoken to the Inspection Service telling them, hey, you have police officers, let's use them, we have a mail theft epidemic. So that hasn't happened, as far as I know. So, unfortunately, I can't answer your question.

Ms. DEAN. What a shame. As I said, all these things just going in opposite directions. We're hiring and we're consolidating, we're delaying folks getting out on their routes because they're now having to travel 30 minutes into King of Prussia and then upon travel back, or whatever amount of time.

It just seems like a very bad set of strategies, and of course to leave the Postal Police Force so understaffed connects to what Mr. Connolly was talking about in terms of prevention and prosecution of theft.

Mr. Butts, what does the process of prioritizing a route for service look like? Because I know we have households that are going multiple days without delivery, despite some of the statistics we're hearing. How do you prioritize a route, what's it look like, and how do we get to daily delivery for everybody?

Mr. BUTTS. Thank you for that question, Congresswoman. I'm not sure I can give you the full answer. I believe someone from Postal Operations would be better suited for that, but I think the prioritization obviously is based on staffing and employee availability, what they have on hand.

I think we do have—one thing I know is that the Postal Service does have the matrix in place where they can ensure that no one route is missed consecutive days.

I think there needs to be a better operational look at that, that kind of reporting, to ensure that if a route is missed one day, that it's not missed the second day. And I think that would help.

But I think until we address the employee retention—because employee availability actually is starting to level out and come back in the Postal Service. So it's the employee retention that still is a lingering problem.

So until we address that for more of a boots-on-ground perspective of, you know, what does the field need in order to engage these employees and then keep these employees working and engaged,

until we start moving into that kind of thinking, I think we're going to continue to be challenged with employee retention.

Ms. DEAN. I know my time has expired. I thank you, Mr. Chairman, for the indulgence, and thank you, Mr. Butts.

Mr. CONNOLLY. Thank you, Ms. Dean, and thank you, Mr. Butts.

Ms. Houlahan, you're recognized for your five minutes of questioning.

Ms. HOULAHAN. Thank you, Mr. Chairman. Is this working?

I feel as though we've sort of beaten this question about the availability of police and the fact that it's gone from, my understanding in your testimony, to 2,700 police to 350 over a course of—a period of relatively short amount of time, which is an astounding figure.

And let's, for a minute, set that aside because I think part of what this Committee has learned and heard is that we need to ask questions about how that decision was made, who has the authority to change that decision, and can that decision be changed. Because I think what we're seeing is if there's crime with no punishment, there's more crime, and so I think that's something to take away.

But I'd like to, as Ms. Dean said, Representative Dean said, focus on my constituent, Mr. Joe Dobbins, who you saw in the testimony today. He was, as you might recall by his story, assaulted as a letter carrier, on the job.

And despite his injuries and his status as a Federal employee, his case is only being investigated at the local level. And so I am trying to understand—I understand that the likelihood that there are going to be police available to stop that from happening to Mr. Dobbins is, it's unlikely.

But given that it did happen, perhaps Mr. Vaccarella or whomever has the ability to answer this question, why is it that cannot be prosecuted as a Federal crime?

Mr. VACCARELLA. Well, I will—first, I'd like to defer to my colleague, but first I'd like to clarify an inaccuracy by Mr. Butts. There have been no changes with the S and DC or Tri-County. No carriers are traveling to Tri-County or delivering out of Tri-County. Those changes have not happened. There's been no changes in the state of Pennsylvania.

In answer to your question—

Ms. HOULAHAN. Well, perhaps with what amounts of my time, sir, we can clarify that because I was intrigued by that too, because Devon and Berwyn are in my district. So I'd like to learn more about that, but I really would like to get to the answer of why, if a mail carrier is carrying the mail and is assaulted, it's not a federally prosecuted crime and what we can to make sure that that is no longer the case while we're waiting for more police.

And if you're the not the right person to answer, perhaps I can open it to other people.

Mr. VACCARELLA. Yes. I will defer to my Postal Inspection Service colleague, Peter Rendina.

Mr. RENDINA. Good afternoon and thank you very much for the question. For this particular investigation, it was investigated federally by U.S. postal inspectors. We worked the investigation with local police in this matter.

We did present this matter for prosecution to Federal court. It was—it was declined for Federal prosecution, but it is now being presented within the local court system for prosecution at this time.

Regarding why it was declined, that would be better answered by Department of Justice, the U.S. Attorney's office.

Ms. HOULAHAN. Well, I will definitely be pursuing that, because it just seems that when you're trying to deter crime, there's nothing more deterrent than it being a literal Federal crime. And we all grow up knowing that we can't go into somebody else's mailbox because it's a Federal crime. I don't understand why, if a postal worker is touched just like a TSA worker is touched, that it's not a Federal crime.

With what remains in my question time, I want to talk a little bit more about the Oxford, Pennsylvania, post office which we talked about sudden closures and I would like to pursue the idea that we need to have a metric of office, unexpected office closures, but the last part of my time, Gay Street, which is in West Chester, has a very similar issue it sounds as my colleague Mary Gay has with ADA compliance.

Constituents who have disabilities in West Chester are being told they need to wait outside for service and that only is if there are enough staff people who are able to leave the office and come outside to attend and help them. There are proposals around for expanding postal banking and other similar demanding services like that, but if there are places like my post office in West Chester where people cannot access the space, how will we accomplish expanding services like postal banking? Who would be able to help me understand accessibility and access?

Mr. VACCARELLA. Yes, thank you, Congresswoman. As with the Chester building, the Gay Street building in West Chester is a historic building and those buildings are exempt from the Architectural Barriers agreement. So we do go out of our way, and we will assist customers who call us and ask for assistance, and we will service those customers at their car.

Ms. HOULAHAN. So my understanding is this particular place is, of course, a historic area because Philadelphia is a historic area, and that there is a ramp in the back that is only for employees. Is there no way that we can have access to this particular facility?

Mr. VACCARELLA. Not from the rear dock or employee entrance, no.

Ms. HOULAHAN. Well, I would love to have a follow-on conversation with you on that, because I'm certain I'm not alone with Pennsylvania being as historic as it is or other places like it, we need to have access opportunities for people who happen to live in historic locations. Thank you.

I yield back.

Mr. CONNOLLY. Thank you so much, Ms. Houlahan.

Just real briefly, Mr. Rendina, what are arrow keys and why are they important to the discussion about mail theft? Mr. Rendina?

Mr. RENDINA. Yes, sir. Thank you very much for the question. Arrow keys are access devices to be able to get into various repositories for United States mail.

Mr. CONNOLLY. And do ill-doers now have access to arrow keys?

Mr. RENDINA. Yes. There have been thefts of arrow keys.

Mr. CONNOLLY. And that has led to the proliferation of mail theft, in general. Is that correct, including the sort of re-signatures of checks consumers have written so that those checks get inflated and get cashed into the wrong accounts? Is that correct?

Mr. RENDINA. Yes. It's one element that has led to what we're seeing as an increase in mail theft, and we do have a multi-layer strategy to address mail theft, and we're not going to be able to arrest our way out of this issue. I've heard a lot about prevention, and prevention's incredibly important to our strategy.

We're communicating with our postal employees, customers, our Federal, state, and local partners. I want to say thank you to Congressman Fitzpatrick regarding his service as an FBI agent. We worked well with all of our law enforcement partners on prevention and then protection.

We're increasing the security of those blue boxes that you see across the country. We have various strategies to make it much more difficult to get into those boxes, to include addressing the key and lock situation. We're looking to use technology to make it less valuable to have one of these arrow keys. And we do also understand that the perpetrators of mail theft are becoming more sophisticated.

They're using dark web online chat rooms to organize, and postal inspectors are working to investigate that. So we've talked a lot about investigation. We've talked about enforcing the laws, but, again, preventions very important. That's why we work with our local police departments who are charged with protecting communities where our letter carriers are and where those blue boxes are so that your constituents, our customers can use the United States mail.

Mr. CONNOLLY. Thank you. And I'm glad to hear about the progress, but I will point out that one of the articles from The Washington Post that I entered into the record earlier, which was written on April or published on April 30th of this year, focused on these blue boxes and arrow keys, all of which could trace to the fact that consumers trusted that box and they were euchred by ill-doers who then took advantage of the system and were able to engage successfully in theft.

You talked about prevention, and I think all of us would agree, an effective prevention strategy, if it's 100 percent, means we don't have to worry about crime because we're preventing it. But the fact of the matter is, you had 300,000 mail theft complaints between March 2020 and February 2021, less than a year period, 300,000.

It's only gone up since, and yet only 1,090 mail theft cases were pursued, and you said we can't prosecute our way out of this. Well, of the 1,090, which is less than one half of 1 percent of the total that were pursued, well, how many convictions did we have?

Mr. RENDINA. For last year, sir, if I can re-ask the time period?

Mr. CONNOLLY. Yes. OK.

Mr. RENDINA. So we're looking at just over 1,200 convictions. And those convictions don't always line up year to year because it takes time for the court process.

Mr. CONNOLLY. Yes. Just to make sure I get it right on the record, 1,200. Is that right?

Mr. RENDINA. Just over 1,200, sir.

Mr. CONNOLLY. OK. Well, you know, that's great, but what we all worry about here is that's still less than one half of 1 percent. And, obviously, you're right that prosecution and conviction aren't the only way out of this, but some prosecution and conviction is a deterrent. People have to know there is a cost if their caught that we're going to be aggressive about this.

Can you reassure us that that is, in fact, the policy we are pursuing or part of the policy we're pursuing?

Mr. RENDINA. Yes. We're going to—we are aggressively pursuing mail thieves. Not only that, but, again, the talking to our customers about how they can protect themselves and protect the mail. Like this morning, I mailed a check to Selinsgrove, Pennsylvania, from my residence here in Washington, DC, mailed that at a blue collection box here in D.C.

One of the things I did was, I looked at when that last pick up time was at that blue box to ensure that the letter was not going to sit in the blue box overnight. Now, the particular blue box I went to, I know has high security devices inside to keep the mail safe.

We continue to work on securing those blue boxes and hardening the target, making it harder for criminals to take our customers, our American citizens' mail. They trust the Postal Service.

Mr. CONNOLLY. Thank you. I will point out, though, parenthetically some of the changes Mr. DeJoy made when he took over as postmaster general was actually to make less frequent the pickup on a lot of mailboxes. I can remember going through Quincy, Massachusetts with my brother who happens to live there and every single mailbox we went to, the time of pickup of mail had been changed.

And in many cases, it went from two times a day to one time a day, and in some cases, there was no pick up on Friday and, you know, that confuses consumers and I think underlines the problem we face in terms of making it easier to steal, to take advantage of that system.

Mr. Albergo, my final question, I just want to make sure I get it for the record. And Ms. Houlihan said we don't want to beat a dead horse and nor do I, but let me beat a dead horse. We have seen theft go up targeting consumers and we have seen violence against postal workers, including letter carriers also go up on their routes and so forth.

Is that correct?

Mr. ALBERGO. Absolutely.

Mr. CONNOLLY. Significantly?

Mr. ALBERGO. Significantly. It has exploded.

Mr. CONNOLLY. And certainly in response—now here I am beating a dead horse, but I want to make sure we get it right. And certainly in response, the postmaster general and the USPS has beefed up the police service and broadened its jurisdiction to protect people on carrier routes and to make sure that we are deterring and preventing, as Mr. Rendina said, theft.

Mr. ALBERGO. No. They did the exact opposite. They started defunding us. They revoked our jurisdictional authority. They con-

fined us to postal property. They—they did the exact opposite what common sense would dictate. That's what they did.

Mr. CONNOLLY. Hum. Well, that's something we're certainly going to pursue. And Ms. Perez, I think you'll be hearing from us as well in terms of your office in pursuit of that. But that not only makes no sense, but it, frankly, puts postal workers and the public at risk.

And that's unacceptable to this subcommittee, to Members of Congress, on both sides of the aisle. And if there's one takeaway from this hearing for me that's it.

I want to thank everybody. Is there anything else for the good of the order?

Again, thank you to the members of the delegation. As soon as we adjourn the hearing, we're going to move immediately to a press availability for members of the Pennsylvania delegation to share with your local media your take on this set of issues.

I want to thank all of our witnesses. I want to thank our committee staff, one of whom has a birthday. Melanie. Melanie, thank you for being with us today. She gave up her birthday to be with us today, wonderful committee staff. Thank you so much. And thanks to everybody and my staff for making today possible.

If there are any questions that members want to continue to pursue, if you could do it through the chair and we'll make sure we get it to our witnesses. We would ask our witnesses to try to get that answers back in a timely fashion.

And with that, we are adjourned.

[Whereupon, at 1:12 p.m., the subcommittee was adjourned.]

